

INDIAN CHICK-LIT: FORM AND CONSUMERISM

Jennifer P. Barber

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

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Chair

Accepted by

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Dean, Graduate School  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis critically examines Indian-U.S. chick-lit in order to illustrate its complexity and to point out why scholars should give their attention to this sub-genre of mainstream chick-lit. Indian chick-lit's adherence to mainstream chick-lit's conventions causes the articulation of the Indian heroine's hybrid identity to be very difficult. This thesis also explores how Indian chick-lit problematizes chick-lit's invitation for the reader to identify with the female character when Indian chick-lit shows that assimilation to U.S. culture is pointless.

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## INTRODUCTION

The recent appearance of Indian-U.S. chick-literature presents the Indian heroine's experience in the diaspora in a way that has not been done before. Unlike novels such as Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine, which depict the seriousness of the Indian female character's journey in the diaspora to the U.S., Indian chick-lit emphasizes the humor in it. This analysis focuses on two Indian-U.S. chick-lit novels: Kavita Daswani's The Village Bride of Beverly Hills and Sonia Singh's Goddess for Hire. The focus is on cross-cultural experience; that is, the female characters' struggles in the diaspora in the U.S. fit both the conventions of mainstream chick-lit and those of more "serious" diaspora literature.

The cross-cultural experiences include the Indian female character's move from India to the U.S.; her life in the U.S.; and her return home to India after living in the U.S. This exploration examines Indian leading ladies who reside in the U.S. and who choose to adapt to U.S. culture even while mainstream society rejects them and while their family pressures them to retain an Indian identity. This exploration examines the Indian heroine's struggle with her cultural identity in the conflicts that construct the chick-lit form, such as the love conflict, the work conflict, the maturity conflict, and the beauty conflict; the obsessive consumption of goods; and the identification with the homeland.

Chick-literature is a genre that portrays heroines in their late teens, their twenties, and their thirties, and it presents the pressures female characters feel from society and from their families to be romantically and professionally successful. Furthermore, chick-literature depicts the stress that female protagonists feel to be thin, beautiful, and trendy, but it shows all of these problems with a tone that is lighthearted and at times comical.

The rise of chick-literature's popularity begins with Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary. Bridget Jones is a character who struggles with obtaining a desirable weight and finding a husband in her thirties. Most readers find Bridget's personal battles humorous, and they sympathize with her when she continually embarrasses herself.

Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young describe the typical chick-lit heroines as “not perfect but flawed, eliciting readers' compassion and identification simultaneously” (4). They further contend that these heroines “deploy self-deprecating humor that not only entertains but also leads readers to believe they are fallible-like them” (4). The characters' humor makes them likeable and it helps the readers to identify with them. The readers' identification with the heroines of chick-lit suggests that the genre defines gender in terms of stereotypical female qualities, such as love of fashion, beauty, and romance. When chick-lit's readers identify with the heroines, the novels show the readers' participation in the same incidental worries that pervade the characters' storylines. So the novels, by encouraging identification, reinforce readers' sense of the ‘naturalness’ of gender. However, Indian chick-lit problematizes the reader's invitation to identify with the heroine when this sub-genre portrays acquiescence to mainstream society negatively. Even though the Indian heroine tries to belong to U.S. culture, society rejects her and her family disapproves of her choice to assimilate. The reader is unable to identify with a protagonist whom others criticize.

Critics of chick-lit denounce the genre and claim that it adheres to patriarchal ideology. Anna Weinberg dismisses chick-lit as “trash that imitates other, better books that could have ushered in a new wave of smart, postfeminist writing” (qtd. in Ferriss and Young 9). Ferriss and Young quote Doris Lessing when she criticizes chick-lit;

Lessing asserts that “‘it would be better, perhaps, if [female novelists] wrote books about their lives” and not about “these helpless girls, drunken, worrying about their weight” (qtd. in Ferriss and Young 2). Since the heroines of chick-lit focus on finding a mate in order to make their lives complete, some feminist critics attack the genre because they “expect literature by and about women to advance the political activism of feminism, to represent women’s struggles in patriarchal culture and offer inspiring images of strong, powerful women” (Ferriss and Young 9). This criticism of chick-lit suggests that all books by and about women should question whether gender is a ‘natural’ occurrence.

While chick-lit does not reflect feminist views on patriarchal ideology, it does reflect post-feminist views. Post-feminism is a phrase that Cris Mazza uses in order to describe the ideology behind chick-lit: “It’s writing that says women are independent [and] confident, but not lacking in their share of human weakness [and] not necessarily self-empowered” (9). Chick-lit shows female characters who are able to prevail in a patriarchal world. For instance, in Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones's Diary, Bridget exudes strength when she shows up to a Tarts and Vicars party in a “bunny girl outfit” (145), and discovers that the theme party was cancelled. The other ladies wear their “[c]ountry [c]asuals” (145) and the men wear “slacks and [v]-necked sweaters” (146), and even though she looks ridiculous, Bridget stays at the party. Bridget’s decision to remain at the event suggests that she is confident and comfortable with her identity.

A second reason critics reprimand chick-lit is for the genre’s obsession with beauty. Heroines in chick-lit novels constantly worry about their weight. The relationship “between a woman’s appearance and the chances of her [...] success in bedrooms and boardrooms is an issue that has long been central to discussions of

feminism” (Ferriss and Young 11). For example, in Jane Green’s Jemima J, Jemima is perpetually on and off of the scale throughout the novel. The reader sympathizes with Jemima when she shows that she feels insecure about the way that she looks. Jemima wishes that was “thin, gorgeous, and could get any man” (1) she wanted. In defense of chick-lit, Ferriss and Young contend that the genre portrays “the reality of young women grappling with modern life” (9). Here, the genre uses real women’s obsession with body weight to construct gender in chick-lit. If a preoccupation exists with weight in society, then it is appropriate to focus on this anxiety in chick-lit. When chick-literature mirrors women in reality and depicts heroines who worry over trivial concerns, like weight, it also shows the readers how they are complicit when they allow these same worries to pervade their lives.

A third reason critics reproach chick-lit is for the genre’s infatuation with consumerism. In chick-lit novels such as Lauren Weisberger’s The Devil Wears Prada, the heroines lose themselves in a world where what is paramount is whether or not they own the newest Gucci or Balenciaga bag. The protagonists exchange their individual identity for one that fashion icons such as Sarah Jessica Parker deem chic. For instance, in Weisberger’s novel, Andrea Sachs is a recent graduate from Brown University, and she aspires to be a journalist for The New Yorker. Andrea sells out “to work at a fashion magazine” (24) and succumbs to wearing “Manolos” and “Gucci pants that [hug] [her] thighs and hips so tightly [they] both [begin] to tingle within minutes of [...] securing the final button” (2). This view leads critics to ask: “Is chick-lit ‘buying in’ to a degrading and obsessive consumer culture, or is it ultimately exposing the limitations of a consumerist’s worldview?” (Ferriss and Young 11). Again, chick-lit borrows women’s



fascination with fashion in reality in order to construct gender. If women in the real world concern themselves with fashion and consumerism, then it is appropriate to explore and reflect this obsession in chick-lit. Chick-lit thus reflects the reader's involvement with the same interests as the heroine, which may produce a moment of introspection. And in this moment of self-reflection, the reader may see her own involvement and consequently alter her view of the world.

Within the genre of chick-lit that critics disparage and attack, there are different forms of chick-lit. Ferriss and Young explore other sub-genres, such as "faith-based versions of adolescent chick lit, mommy lit, southern lit, and African-American lit" (6). While Ferriss and Young point out that Latino, Chinese, and Indian heroines' experiences in the U.S. are also sub-genres of chick-lit, they exclude them from their research; this thesis picks up where Ferriss and Young leave off. With the emergence of Indian chick-literature, there is now a new type of novel for scholars to study. Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Rajini Srikanth assert that "ethnic writers reflect the general desire of their communities to be considered full and equal participants in the fabric of American life" (371). However, Indian chick-lit shows that while the Indian heroine desires to belong in the U.S., she can never become a full and equal participant in U.S. culture. The Indian female character's experience in the diaspora is such that she possesses neither an Indian identity nor an U.S. identity. She loses her identity from her homeland, and while she tries to assimilate to the host country, she can never fully embrace its identity either.

In the exploration of Indian chick-lit, this argument addresses the criticisms of mainstream chick-lit from a specifically post-colonial and diasporic perspective. For instance, Indian chick-lit problematizes chick-lit's invitation for the reader to identify

with the heroine when Indian chick-lit shows that assimilation to certain aspects of U.S. life, such as consumerism, work, and marriage, is a disturbing identification. In Indian chick-lit, the heroine's absorption into U.S. culture is troubling because it causes many problems for the character throughout the novel. Furthermore, U.S. society rejects the Indian female character's desire to belong, which suggests to the reader that assimilation does not achieve anything. And in another way, Indian chick-lit critiques mainstream chick-lit by showing how the dominant genre's conventions make the achievement of a hybrid female identity very difficult the character. In Indian chick-lit, the heroine acclimates to aspects of U.S. culture, such as to views on marriage, the workforce, and beauty. And since the female character's family resists her assimilation and pressures her to retain an Indian identity, the genre shows that the heroine's hybridity is very difficult to define. Indian chick-lit suggests that the heroine must choose between having a U.S. identity and having an Indian identity, which indicates that she can not have both identities.

It is important to take a closer look at Indian chick-lit because it has been ignored by literary scholars both of chick-literature and of post-colonial literature. Post-colonial scholars' decision to ignore Indian chick-lit suggests that this genre is not held in the same esteem as diasporic literature that scholars critically explore. Post-colonial scholars' neglect of chick-lit may well be due to what Juliette Wells points out: namely, that literary works by women have a long history of being disregarded, "because chick-lit's writers are exclusively women" (48) and so are its readers. The negative view of the genre arises from the perspective "that women's writing is inferior to men's and that women readers prefer lightweight novels to literary ones" (48). Wells asserts that what

separates chick-lit from other literary works is that it “positions itself firmly as entertaining rather than thought provoking, as fiction rather than literature” (49). While Wells’ interest in chick-lit clearly suggests that she finds that the genre possesses literary merit, her remark indicates that chick-lit is primarily entertainment and not intellectual. Scholars ignore Indian chick-lit for the same reasons that chick-lit is ignored: it is “‘unserious’” and “antifeminist” (Ferriss and Young 9); however, Indian chick-lit is useful to post-colonial discourse because the female characters in these books experience the same struggles with their cultural identities as Indian heroines in literature that is critically recognized, such as the work of Bharati Mukherjee, winner of the National Book Critics Award in 1988, and the work of Jhumpa Lahiri, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2000. What separates chick-lit from the works that scholars recognize is that the chick-lit form consists of elements that society deems trivial, like shopping and attention to beauty. However, in Indian chick-lit, these elements are not meaningless. The Indian heroine’s assimilation to these aspects of U.S. culture, coupled with its negative portrayal, problematizes the reader’s identification with her. It is difficult for the reader to identify with a character whom society rejects because the reader refuses to believe that he or she is someone that people ostracize.

In order to give background information on the Indian diaspora that this thesis discusses, it is imperative to look at it from a historical point of view. Vijay Mishra argues that there are two Indian diasporas, and he refers to them as the old and the new. The first Indian diaspora occurred after slavery was abolished in the 1830s. The British sent Indians to work in other parts of the British Empire until 1917. And the second Indian diaspora occurred during the 1960s when the U.S. passed the Immigration act of

1965, which made it so that immigration to the U.S. did not focus on race. The books treated here are ones that the authors write after the new Indian diaspora. Aparna Rayaprol claims that the majority of the Indians who moved to the United States in the 1960s were educated and were “primarily doctors, engineers, professors, and technicians” (Rayaprol15). The Indian’s immigration to the United States is different from any of the other Indian diasporas: in the United States, the majority of Indians belong to an affluent socioeconomic class, whereas in other countries, such as Britain, Indians belong to a range of socioeconomic classes from the destitute to the wealthy (Rayaprol 11). In the books explored here, the heroines and their families belong to the group of privileged Indians who moved to the U.S. during the 1960s, and who are intellectual and wealthy.

Diaspora theory helps to formulate the understanding of Indian-U.S. chick-lit. According to this theory, there are competing perspectives on what a diaspora is. Makarand Paranjape contends that if the diaspora is voluntary, it “must involve some significant tension between the source and the target cultures” (67). Paranjape’s argument suggests for a subject’s journey to be a diasporic experience, the experience must involve tensions between the subject and the host country. Paranjape’s notion on the importance of tension relates to Indian chick-lit. For example, the heroines in The Village Bride of Beverly Hills and Goddess for Hire both engage in diasporic experiences as they feel tensions between the U.S. culture that they choose to adopt and the Indian culture that their family desires for them to retain. And on another note, Paranjape also asserts that “there is nothing alienating or dispossessing about a South Asian’s sudden burst of stupendous success in Silicon Valley, where she has relocated to better her prospects” (67). This thesis refutes Paranjape's claim in order to argue that the Indian

protagonist's success in Beverly Hills is an alienating experience. The leading ladies in both The Village Bride of Beverly Hills and Goddess for Hire endure a form of alienation from their friends and family when they attain their personal and professional goals.

Furthermore, Paranjape also claims that the literature produced from the second Indian diaspora expresses an "anxiety, if not guilt" (Paranjape 70) about leaving India. Paranjape's finding suggests that the characters in the diaspora feel guilty about leaving India and want to return to their homeland. Paranjape's argument is also useful to comprehending Indian-U.S. chick-lit because some of the Indian heroines miss India and desire to return to it. For instance, in The Village Bride of Beverly Hills, the leading lady feels that she can be complete only in India and returns home. And finally, from a different perspective, Mishra finds that authors such as V.S. Naipaul, who write after the first Indian diaspora, depict miniature Indias in the diasporas (422). Mishra's notion also helps to understand the heroines' opposition in Indian chick-lit. For example, when the female characters' families oppose their assimilation to U.S. culture, it is due to the families' practice of traditional Indian customs. The leading ladies' families create little Indias in America and they expect their children to do so too.

Indian chick-lit encompasses several aspects of both chick-lit and diasporic literature. Like the form in chick-lit, the form in Indian chick-lit consists of at least four major conflicts that the heroines face: those relating to love, work, maturity, and beauty. In Indian chick-lit, the conflicts appear as cultural struggles for the heroine; she tries to adapt to her host country's culture while her family desires her to retain her Indian identity. Indian chick-lit portrays the modern leading character who struggles to obtain her ideal career and the perfect man. Oftentimes, the Indian heroine's romance revolves

around her life before she agrees to an arranged marriage or her life after she participates in an arranged marriage. And similar to the modern heroine in chick-lit, the heroine in Indian chick-lit obsesses over fashion and her appearance; typically, the Indian female protagonist struggles with her desire to dress Western and with her family's wish for her to wear traditional Indian clothes. Indian chick-lit also has a couple of commonalities with diasporic literature. First, Indian chick-lit shows the hardships of living in a host country. Oftentimes, the host country's society alienates the Indian protagonist since she looks foreign and has unfamiliar customs. Second, like characters in diasporic literature, the Indian heroine develops a hybrid identity; she assimilates to her host country and adopts some of its customs. Third, the Indian heroine in this sub-genre of chick-lit adapts to the host country through assimilation. When the Indian female character copies the host country's people and its customs, she ultimately demonstrates that assimilation is futile because it does not help the heroine to achieve anything. And in some novels, Indian chick-lit shows that the concept of "home" is more difficult to define when the heroine returns to the homeland and discovers that she no longer belongs.

In chapter one, it is argued that The Village Bride of Beverly Hills, critiques the mainstream genre when it shows how chick-lit makes the articulation of a hybrid female identity problematic. When Indian chick-lit shows the pressures that the Indian heroine struggles with to be either part of U.S. culture, or to be fully Indian, the novel suggests that she cannot be both. Chapter two examines how the cross-cultural experience in the diaspora and its struggles are represented in one of chick-lit's major themes, consumerism. Goddess for Hire shows that the consumerism convention makes it very difficult for the female character to have a hybrid identity. Chapter three examines

Indian female characters' struggles with their cultural identities in Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter and The Village Bride of Beverly Hills in order to show that Indian female protagonists experience similar conflicts, such as when they return home to India, in both Indian chick-lit and post-colonial literature that scholars critically explore. This chapter emphasizes the degree to which the heroines' alienation in the diaspora is double-sided.

## FORM

The Indian leading lady's cross-cultural experience and her struggles are represented in each of the conflicts in the chick-lit form. The Indian heroine's cultural struggles with her family are as a result of her adherence to U.S. hegemony. Wells asserts that the chick-lit form consists of typical items such as "the heroine's search for an ideal romantic partner; her maturation and growth in self-knowledge; [...]; and her relationship to conventions of beauty" (49). She also points out that "the heroine's experiences in the world of work and her evolution as a professional woman" (49) are part of the chick-lit form.

In Indian-U.S. chick-lit, the crucial elements that construct the chick-lit form, such as the heroine's love interest, her work experience, her maturity throughout the novel, and her beauty consciousness, appear as struggles between her Indian culture and her temptation to adhere to U.S. hegemony. Ultimately, each of the Indian heroine's typical conflicts in the chick-lit form are resolved when she chooses to follow U.S. hegemony; however, once the heroine decides to follow a U.S. ideology, she culturally conflicts with her family, and this battle is resolved when the heroine's family also assimilates to U.S. culture. The female protagonist's cultural struggles, coupled with the typical conflicts in the novel, emphasize her battles throughout the novel. Although the Indian characters by and large succumb to U.S. hegemony, all of the instances of assimilation as well as the pressures to remain as a traditional Indian, tend to thwart the heroine's hybrid identity from developing.

Wells points out that every "chick-lit novel centers on a love plot" (49). For instance, if the heroine is single, she tries to find a mate throughout the novel. If the



female protagonist has a boyfriend, then most likely, a problem occurs in their relationship. And if the heroine is married, she finds out that her husband cheats on her, and she either chooses to work through their problems or to find a new man. Even though Indian-U.S. chick-lit possesses the same romantic plot that helps to construct the chick-lit form, Indian-U.S. chick-lit provides a uniquely Indian take on the romantic element of chick-lit.

The love plot usually centers on the Indian heroine's arranged marriage. If the heroine is not married, then her family tries to find her a suitable match. If the Indian female protagonist is married, then problems occur in her arranged marriage. Typically, the Indian heroine adheres to U.S. hegemony and her husband resists it. The love conflict is resolved when the husband acquiesces to U.S. hegemony. Since the love conflict focuses on the heroine's assimilation to U.S. culture, the novel displays how the female character's adaptation to the host country consequently denies her a hybrid identity. For instance, in The Village Bride of Beverly Hills, Priya's romantic conflict manifests as a problem that she encounters with her arranged husband, Sanjay. While the chick-lit romantic conflict focuses on the husband's infidelity, the Indian-U.S. chick-lit romantic conflict centers on the Indian heroine's adjustment to her "arranged" husband. In Priya's case, she not only struggles to adjust to Sanjay and his family, but also she struggles to adapt to her new life in the U.S.

The cultural aspect of Indian-U.S. chick-lit complicates the romantic conflict in chick-lit in that there is now a conflict between two different cultures: the Indian culture of the married couple and the culture of the country in which they live, the U.S. The Indian husband and his family project two competing expectations on the new Indian

wife. They expect her to be a traditional Indian submissive wife, and they expect her to adopt U.S. customs in her life when they tell her to get a job. For instance, Sanjay's family is a traditional Indian family, and they expect Priya to cook and clean for the family. Sanjay asserts that he wants his "wife, [his] new biwi" (5) to clean for him. Yet, Sanjay's family complicates Priya's perception of her role as a traditional Indian wife when they push her to get a job. Sanjay's mother asserts, "This is not India. In [the U.S.], everybody works" (1). Priya feels conflicted between her duties as a traditional Indian wife and a U.S. Indian wife; she struggles to find where she fits in between being part of the U.S. and being Indian.

Eventually, the Indian protagonist becomes assimilated to the U.S., and it creates a chasm between her and her husband. The Indian heroine succumbs to U.S. hegemony and rejects aspects of Indian customs. According to Antonio Gramsci's theory, hegemony, it is the notion that there is one dominant culture over all other cultures in a given place. In Letters from Prison, Gramsci refers to individuals in subordinate classes as organic intellectuals and he argues that their role is to undermine the dominant culture: "The 'organic intellectual' is one who works consciously for his own social class, convinced that it has a historical 'right' at a given moment" (44). In order to overcome the dominate society, "[s]uccess depends, [...] on the effectual hegemony that the proletarian party comes to exercise over the whole of society" (49). In a hegemonic society, Gramsci's argument indicates that the role of the weaker class is to subvert the power of the ruling class.

In the Indian-U.S. chick-lit novels, the U.S. culture is dominant over other cultures like the Indian and Chinese cultures. When the Indian heroine succumbs to U.S.

hegemony and rejects her Indian culture, it suggests that she desires for U.S. society to accept her; she desires to belong. For instance, Priya rejects Indian culture and succumbs to U.S. hegemony when she seeks advice from a therapist to save her marriage. Sanjay expresses his disgust with Priya's decision to adapt to U.S. hegemony: "'Tell me why you feel you have to go outside for help and advice to these stupid and useless workshops that are not for our type of people'"(224). Sanjay's question suggests that he is most angry about Priya's disrespect for his and her Indian culture. His tirade suggests that Priya should have looked to the family for help rather than help from outside their culture. After living in the U.S., Priya questions her Indian foundation and begins to adopt aspects of U.S. culture in her daily life. Since the many problems that occur in Priya's marriage connect to her assimilation to U.S. culture and her family's pressure for her to retain the same Indian ways of life, the novel suggests that she must choose between the two fixed identities; this pressure that Priya's family and U.S. hegemony place on her makes it very difficult to define Priya's hybridity.

The heroine's experience at work is another crucial element to the chick-lit form, though it certainly comes second to the love plot. Wells asserts that the heroines' "professional identities and workday experiences are certainly important to the texture of chick-lit novels, and sometimes central to their plot" (54). She points out that the heroines in chick-lit have a variety of careers. Some heroines have low-level jobs, while other heroines are very successful in high-power positions. And there are even some heroines in chick-lit who "have love-hate relationships with work that reward them in some ways and punish them in others" (54). Wells' argument suggests that heroines' careers can vary from professional to menial jobs.

The heroine's career is also important in Indian-U.S. chick-lit. What is characteristically cultural about the Indian heroine's work experience is unique in two different ways. First, there are some Indian heroines who crack under the pressure from their parents to succeed. The parents of these heroines came to the U.S. during what Mishra characterizes as the second Indian diaspora, and they are doctors, lawyers, and engineers. These parents hope that their daughters will grow up to become successful professionals like themselves. For example, in Amulya Malladi's Serving Crazy with Curry, Devi, the Indian heroine, is unable to succeed professionally, and she attempts suicide. And second, there are other Indian heroines who desire to be professionally successful, but their families do not support them. The parents of these heroines still hold on to Indian customs and believe that women should not be successful at work. For instance, in The Village Bride of Beverly Hills, Priya desperately wants to be a reporter, but her family wants her to have a simple job, like secretarial work.

The cultural aspect of Indian-U.S. chick-lit complicates the heroine's work experience in that the Indian family projects their professional views and expectations upon the heroine. Typically, the Indian heroine desires a career that differs from what her family wants for her. The heroine feels culturally torn as she wants to satisfy herself and to escape her family's expectations. For instance, once Priya begins work as a receptionist at Hollywood Insider, an entertainment magazine, the executives offer her a position as a reporter. Priya must choose to follow her family's wishes or to follow her own aspirations; in the end, she decides to defy her family and their beliefs on propriety when she accepts the job as a reporter. Priya's evolution as a professional woman manifests as a conflict between her Indian culture and her U.S. way of life. She desires to

grow professionally, but she wants to remain loyal to her family. Again, the novel suggests that the root of Priya's professional problem arises from her desire to adapt to U.S. culture and her family's wish for her to stay as the same Indian woman she was in India; again, both of these desires make the formation of Priya's hybrid identity very troubled.

Throughout each chick-lit novel, the heroine matures and grows. Wells contends that the heroine's maturation is another critical element in the chick-lit form. The heroine "inevitably learns to appreciate herself for who she is" (52). Usually, the heroine quits her demeaning job, tells her abusive boss off, or even loses weight after a period of clarity. The heroine in Indian-U.S. chick-lit also goes through a time when she matures and grows. What is particularly cultural about the Indian heroine's maturity is that since she follows U.S. hegemony, she usually confronts her cultural opposition, whether it is her family or her lover. The heroine's cultural opposition usually adheres to Indian ideology. For instance, after an epiphany, Priya matures when she decides to stop lying to her family and tells them the truth about her job: "I am not who you think I am, but have become who I always wanted to be" (240). Priya decides to leave her husband and his family and return to India. Priya's decision to flee the U.S. represents her growth throughout the novel: she stands up for her beliefs and refuses to pretend to acquiesce to her family's wishes anymore. The cause of Priya's troubles arises from her assimilation to U.S. hegemony and her family's pressure for her to be like she was in India; both of these pressures to choose between fixed identities make the articulation of Priya's hybrid identity very difficult. However, here, during Priya's maturation and growth, she realizes that she can never be the same Indian woman that she was and that she can never

fully embrace an U.S. identity; when she stands up for herself, her hybrid identity begins to show itself.

The heroine's attention to beauty is another important element that constructs the chick-lit form. Wells asserts that a "heroine who is completely free of care about her looks and happily self-accepting is no where to be found in chick-lit" (59). Like the beauty conscious heroine in chick-lit, the Indian heroine also cares about her appearance. What is especially cultural about the Indian leading lady's beauty regimen is that the beauty element typically centers on her decision not to wear Indian attire. Typically, if the Indian female protagonist already lives in the U.S., as is the case in Goddess for Hire, then she already wears Western clothes and she defends her decision to her family. And if the Indian female character is new to the U.S., then she chooses not to wear Indian garments, as she wants to belong in the U.S. For instance, when Priya arrives in Beverly Hills, she wears traditional Indian clothes such as a "daffodil yellow sari" (18) and a "light-blue-with-black-trim salwar kameez"(48). At work, Priya feels ugly and different when her work colleagues tell her that she looks "like a gypsy on speed" (81). Shanisse, Priya's friend at work, takes Priya for a Western make-over and Priya gets new clothes, make-up, and a hair cut. Afterwards, Priya feels "as attractive as Malini, or even Brooke Shields" (83). Here, Shanisse makes the development of Priya's hybrid identity problematic; Shanisse tries to immerse Priya into U.S. hegemony while trying to stifle Priya's Indian identity.

The cultural aspect of the beauty element further complicates the beauty conflict in that there is now a struggle between two different cultures, the Indian culture and the U.S. culture, for the heroine to undergo. Typically, the Indian heroine adheres to U.S.

hegemony when she chooses to dress Western, and she conflicts with her traditional Indian family, who practice Indian culture and wear Indian attire. For example, Priya follows U.S. hegemony when she decides to dress Western secretly at work. Sanjay's parents surprise Priya at work; when they see her Western attire, they ask accusatory questions such as "“whose clothes are those?”" and "“what are you wearing?”" (177). Priya's in-laws' astonishment indicates that they find it difficult to believe that Priya is unable to resist U.S. hegemony. Here, Priya's family's pressure for her to remain as she was in India also makes the articulation of her hybrid identity problematic. While she lives in the U.S., they want her to adhere to Indian customs and not adopt some aspects of U.S. culture. Even though Priya resolves her beauty conflict by becoming beautiful and dressing in Western clothes, her decision to harmonize with U.S. culture causes yet another problem with her family; they expect Priya to remain as the same Indian character that she was in India, but this is not possible. Priya's experience in the diaspora changes her forever. Not only can Priya not be the same Indian heroine, but also she can not fully embrace a U.S. identity.

The Indian protagonist's refusal to resist U.S. hegemony is problematic in two ways. First, the heroine goes against the subordinate culture's role in a hegemonic society and succumbs to U.S. culture without any sort of resistance. She does not cling to her Indian culture and struggle against U.S. ideology. And second, the Indian protagonist undermines the very idea of a common culture. Walter L. Adamson claims that hegemony also "“represents the advance to a 'class consciousness,' where class is understood not only economically but also in terms of a common intellectual and moral awareness, a common culture”" (171). However, Priya can never share a common culture

with other U.S. citizens. Underneath Priya's acquiescence to U.S. culture, she still possesses an Indian identity; she has a hybrid identity.

The Indian heroine's adherence to U.S. hegemony differs from that of her traditional Indian family because they practice Indian customs and initially try resist the new culture. Vijay Mishra asserts that the practice of Indian customs in the diaspora is a characteristic of "the old Indian diaspora" (422). In the old Indian diaspora, Indians live their lives as if they are still in India, and this is how Sanjay and his family live their life. Sanjay's family practices Indian culture in the manner that they dress, in their view of women, and in their choice to live together.

The Indian heroine struggles with her family's practice of Indian culture in the diaspora because she strives for a hybrid identity. Homi Bhabha compares hybridity to a stairwell that has binary black and white sections and he asserts that "[t]he stairwell as liminal space, [...], becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white" (4). He maintains that the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). Bhabha's notion suggests that the interstitial passage undermines the idea of fixed identifications. His idea also indicates that a subject who lives in one culture while from another culture becomes a hybrid subject when he or she identifies with both cultures. The subject's identification with both cultures undermines the idea of fixed cultural identities.

Priya embraces her hybridity and ceases to believe that her marriage is a fulfilling one. As Priya becomes familiar with the U.S., she compares her life to that of U.S.



citizens. When Priya interviews Arabella Tomas, Priya learns that Arabella is in a troubled relationship. Priya becomes introspective and sees the flaws in her marriage; she surprises herself when she asserts that some days she feels “‘like [she] want[s] to leave’” (173) Sanjay. After working with U.S. citizens like Arabella, Priya changes her identity; she realizes that she can never have the identity that she possessed in India and she can never fully possess a U.S. identity. Priya expresses her realization that she no longer possesses a pure Indian identity: “‘In America, there is no shame in divorce. In India, there is no shame in living in marital misery. Somehow [she] [is] going to find [her] place’” (174). Priya’s assertion suggests that she is somewhere in the middle between an U.S. identity and an Indian identity; she is a mixture; she possesses a hybrid identity. Priya’s hybrid identity undermines the U.S. power structure; her hybridity subverts binary assumptions of what it is to have a U.S. identity.

Eventually, the Indian heroine’s struggle with her family ends when her opposition stops stifling her hybrid identity and ceases pressuring her to remain as the same Indian character she was in India. For example, Sanjay and Priya reconcile when he accedes to her desire to adopt aspects of an U.S. lifestyle. Sanjay no longer cares whether Priya works as a reporter: “‘You can work or not work, I don’t care. Please, come home with me’” (260). Similarly, Priya’s in-laws allow Priya’s hybrid identity to develop when they no longer care what sort of job she has. Priya’s mother-in-law asserts that Priya’s job “‘is very good pay. We can do with it’” (243). In order for the resolution to occur in Indian-U.S. chick-lit, the cultural struggle between the heroine and her family resolves, and the heroine’s hybrid identity is finally able to fully develop. Even though the resolution of the novel centers on the family’s acceptance of the heroine’s hybridity,

the pressures throughout the novel for her to remain as a traditional Indian character and the pressures to adopt a U.S. identity point to how difficult it is for the heroine to develop a hybrid identity.

After all, the crucial elements in the Indian-U.S. chick-lit form portray the heroine's cultural struggle with her family throughout the novel. She struggles culturally while she tries to satisfy both her family and herself. And through the cultural struggles with her family, the novel shows that the Indian heroine can never be the same Indian character that she was in India and she can never really belong in the U.S. The pressures to be like an Indian in India and to have a U.S. identity both make the articulation of the leading lady's hybrid identity problematic.

## INDIAN CHICK-LIT AND CONSUMERISM

The Indian heroine's cross-cultural experience in the diaspora to the U.S. and her struggles are portrayed in one of chick-lit's key topics, consumerism. Juliette Wells asks, "Without shopping, could chick lit exist?" (62). Wells' query suggests the importance of consumerism to chick-lit. The leading ladies of chick-lit shop constantly in order to remain chic and in vogue; in chick-lit, fashion is a large part of the heroine's identity. Wells explores the connection between fashion and identity in chick-lit: "[C]onsumer goods are essential to chick-lit heroines' self-conception and self-presentation, and writers commonly give as much attention to the obtaining and assembling of outfits as to the maintenance of faces and bodies" (62). Chick-lit's preoccupation with fashion relates to Ferriss and Young's contention that chick-lit reflects women grappling with modern life. Here, chick-lit constructs gender when it characterizes a female as a shopping maniac. Chick-lit relies on stereotypes in television, such as the characters on Sex and the City, so that a large number of women will identify with chick-lit's characters. However, Indian chick-lit's adherence to mainstream's chick-lit's consumerism convention disrupts the reader's invitation to identify with the Indian heroine. Even though the Indian heroine shops fanatically, U.S. society will not accept her. The Indian heroine's rejection suggests that assimilation is useless because the character is unable to get what she wants.

In Indian-U.S. chick-lit, the heroine's consumerist display represents her desire to belong in the U.S. In chick-lit, the female protagonist's consumption is important to her self-conception, while in Indian chick-lit, the heroine's consumption of goods is imperative to her self-conception as a U.S. citizen. In Sonia Singh's Goddess for Hire,

Maya Mehra shops and buys popular products in order to fit in the U.S. Similar to Becky Bloomwood, the heroine in Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic Trilogy*, who "fully engages in a culture of conspicuous consumption, fashioning and refashioning her identity by means of her label-driven purchases" (Van Slooten 219), Maya too refashions her Indian identity in order to adopt an U.S. identity. Goddess for Hire critiques chick-lit and shows that the chick-lit element, consumerism, makes it difficult for the female protagonist to have a hybrid identity.

Maya's cultural conflict revolves around her assimilation to U.S. consumerism, while her loved ones resist it. Yet, Maya can never fully assimilate to U.S. hegemony, nor can she ever possess an Indian identity; she rests somewhere in the middle between these two identities. The novel's focus on the pressures that Maya feels to adopt a U.S. identity and to have an Indian identity makes it very difficult for her to have a hybrid identity. Ultimately, the cultural battle is resolved when Maya relinquishes her desire to possess only a U.S. fashionista identity and when she embraces her calling to become the Hindu goddess Kali; her friends and family no longer care about Maya's adoption of U.S. consumerism since she still holds on to her Indian culture. In the end, the leading lady finally embraces her hybridity.

The Indian heroine shops extravagantly in order to prove to society that she is a member of a high socioeconomic class. Thorstein Veblen asserts that expensive clothes are "evidence of pecuniary success" and "social worth" (104). Veblen's notion suggests what expensive clothes signify to the leisure class and to others. Veblen's concept suggests if a person buys costly clothes, it indicates the person is rich and the person is important. For instance, Maya buys her extravagant and pricy purchases of clothes and

shoes in order to prove to the people of Beverly Hills that she connects with their exclusive crowd. To show everyone that she comes from a high socioeconomic class, Maya drives around in a bright “canary yellow Hummer H2” (1). Maya’s possession of a Hummer implies that she has the money to afford it and the money to maintain it. When Maya tries to prove her social status to a security guard, she exclaims, “For God’s sake I drive one of the most expensive cars on the market!” (98). Maya’s statement suggests that since she is rich, she should be allowed to be amongst the other socialites; she relies on her expensive truck for her social status. In a way, her Hummer is her ticket into Camino Real.

If the Indian heroine is unemployed, then together her unemployed status and her obsessive shopping habit augment her social worth; her unemployment, coupled with her shopping habit, shows that she can afford to shop without a job. Veblen explores unemployment, shopping, and social status: “If in addition to showing that the wearer can afford to consume freely and uneconomically, it can also be shown [...] that he or she is not under the necessity of earning a livelihood, the evidence of social worth is enhanced in a very considerable degree” (105). Veblen’s insight indicates that a person who does not need to work and who continues to shop is worth even more in society. For example, Singh’s first description of Maya depicts the heroine’s jobless status and her social worth as she shops on her birthday. As Maya spends heaps of money on clothes, she has no less than “eight shopping bags” (2). She is glad that her birthday falls on a Saturday so that she can shop; however, if her birthday were on a weekday, it would not matter because it’s “one of the benefits to being unemployed” (2). Immediately, Maya falls under the category of the very rich. If she shops on her birthday and does not have a job, it

suggests that she comes from a very affluent family that is willing to pay for her extravagance.

The Indian heroine shows society that she is like all the other U.S. citizens when she buys only the items that are vogueish. Veblen examines the importance of an in-style wardrobe and its significance for the leisure class: "Dress must not only be conspicuously expensive and inconvenient: it must at the same time be up to date" (106). Veblen's approach suggests that a member of the leisure class wear only the most current trends and not last season's. Throughout the novel, Singh describes Maya's clothes and associates all of them with a particular brand name and designer. Maya buys only the trendiest and the most expensive items. She has a "Kate Spade bag" (20) and what any hip girl must have, "Seven jeans" (135). Singh's emphasis on Maya's obsession with name brand items also alludes to Maya's longing to belong in the U.S. None of Maya's relatives shop excessively, nor do they not have jobs. Maya is different from her family in that she desperately yearns to enter Beverly Hills' leisure class.

In Indian-U.S. chick-lit, the heroine's up-to-date closet characterizes her in a negative manner: it shows that she is a self-indulgent character. Veblen asserts that current fashion "is another corollary under the law of conspicuous waste" (106). Veblen's outlook indicates that it is wasteful for an individual to buy new clothes every season instead of recycling their wardrobe. Maya's aspiration to belong in the U.S. transforms her into a wasteful heroine. Here, the novel portrays Maya's adoption of U.S. consumerism negatively. Her dedication to having a fashionable closet causes her to spend an outrageous amount of money on clothes and accessories. Ultimately, Maya's design to relate to the U.S. leisure class causes friction between her and her parents.

Maya's mom reproaches her daughter when she contends that Maya spends all of her "time shopping, going to the salon, and doing God knows what" (169). To voice their concern and their disapproval, Maya's parents give Maya thirty days to improve her lifestyle or she's "out of the house" (170). While Maya's parents disapprove of her indulgence in U.S. consumerism and the U.S. lifestyle, they do not push her to be a traditional Indian; however, they do push her to adopt aspects of an Indian identity, such as proper Indian clothing at family events. Maya's desire to fully embrace a U.S. identity makes it very difficult for her to have a hybrid identity.

In Indian chick-lit, when the Indian protagonist obsessively consumes American goods in order to fit in, she mimics an American consumerist identity. Homi Bhabha asserts that mimicry is "the sign of a double articulation: a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" ("Of Mimicry and Man" 266). Bhabha's theory of mimicry suggests that the Other changes its identity in order to mimic instances of colonial power so that it can gain power. In Indian chick-lit, it is the Indian heroine who is the Other and who mimics U.S. ways of life. Through her mimicry, the Indian protagonist reforms and regulates her Indian identity so that the Beverly Hills' fashionistas will accept her; however, to use Shankar and Srikanth's language, Maya can never become a full and equal participant in U.S. life. Even though Maya does everything she can to belong, the fashionistas reject her. Maya's rejection by the elite class demonstrates that mimicry is pointless; if the socialites will not accept her, then it is not worth trying to be like them.

Maya alters her traditional Indian dress in order to mimic and dress as the fashionistas in Beverly Hills. Maya mimics fashion icons in Vogue and Elle in order to

exhibit what is mod. When Maya realizes that she is the goddess Kali, she is not sure what to wear when she captures the evil men and women of Beverly Hills and she expresses her qualm: “What does a goddess wear to kick ass? In Style magazine [has] yet to cover the issue, so it [is] all up to me” (135). Maya’s custom is to abide by what fashion magazines deem appropriate to wear to specific events such as dates, weddings, funerals, and parties. However, since the fashion world has yet to discern what is appropriate for a goddess to wear, Maya is apprehensive about her apparel and finds it difficult to make her own decisions. Maya’s mimicry of Beverly Hills’ fashionistas is an act of complicity and it characterizes her as a wanna-be; Maya chooses to follow others’ fashion sense instead of her own.

Even though the Indian heroine mimics U.S. consumerism and the world of high fashion, it is clear to others and to her that she is different. Bhabha asserts that “in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (“Of Mimicry and Man” 266). Bhabha’s notion indicates that mimicry is supposed to produce a difference between the Other and what it mimics. The subject is apparently different, while it also looks similar. For example, while Maya buys similar articles of clothing such as “Bebe” (103) shirts and “Sergio Rossi sling backs” (136), she is aware that she is not like the other fashionistas in Beverly Hills. When Maya learns that she has to confront the evil Gwen at Camino Real, she becomes apprehensive. Maya knows that she is culturally different from the women in the country club. Maya hates country clubs for their “homogeneous membership” and for their “narrow-minded thinking,” but “mostly [she resents] not being a member” (99). Maya’s assertion indicates that the members of country clubs discriminate against people of color without taking into



consideration socioeconomic status. Once inside Camino Real, Maya's marginality and her "otherness" are magnified when Gwen exclaims to Maya, "'You're not a member!'" (103) When Gwen first sees Maya and notices that she is Indian, Gwen is aware that Maya is not a member since there are not any Indian members in the country club. Even though Maya puts forth a great effort to look like all other fashionistas, they still reject her. Here, Maya's rejection from the country club shows that mimicry is not productive. It is pointless for Maya to mimic fashionistas if they refuse to accept her.

The writers of chick-lit do not condemn consumerism. Wells claims that "although chick-lit writers certainly satirize the excesses they depict, they do not attack [...] the very foundations of consumer culture" (64). She points out that "the genre as a whole does not cast any lasting doubt on the notion that self-indulgence is [a] key to a rewarding life" (64). Wells's argument suggests that critics should not condemn the heroine for her guilty pleasure. In regards to Indian-U.S. chick-lit, the Indian heroine's adherence to U.S. consumerism also indicates that she follows U.S. hegemony. And the Indian heroine succumbs to U.S. hegemony in order to belong, in order to possess a life that she deems a fulfilling one. Yet, the Indian protagonist's adherence to U.S. hegemony denies her hybridity. And since U.S. society rejects the Indian leading lady and considers her a wanna-be, Indian chick-lit suggests that assimilation is pointless. If the heroine cannot achieve what she wants through mimicry, then the concept is useless to her.

## THE CONCEPT OF HOME

The similarity between the protagonists' return to the homeland in both diasporic literature that scholars critically recognize and in Indian chick-lit illustrate that both genres incorporate the same diasporic encounters. For instance, in both genres, the heroines discover that their return to the homeland makes their idea of 'home' more difficult to define. Ultimately, the heroines' alienation at home in India emphasizes their estrangement from their loved ones and from society in the diaspora. In Indian chick-lit, the protagonist looked at is Priya in The Village Bride of Beverly Hills and in diasporic literature that scholars write about, the heroine treated here is Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter.

In both types of literature, the female protagonists become spiritually lost in the diaspora. William Safran asserts that "members of diaspora communities are by turns mistreated by the host country as 'strangers within the gates' or welcomed or exploited for the sake of the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country" (92). Safran's claim suggests that diasporic subjects become spiritually lost when the inhabitants of the host country treat them as outsiders. For example, in Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter, Tara Banerjee mentally loses her way in the world. Living in New York drives Tara "to despair" (41). She tries to connect with India by hanging silk scarves around the apartment and making "curried hamburger" (40), but it is not enough. And like the protagonist in traditional diasporic literature, the Indian heroine in chick-lit also becomes spiritually wayward in the diaspora. For example, after Priya's marriage fails, she longs for the moment in time when she is happy. She expresses her culturally torn identity in the U.S.: "This country is too big and the people too foreign and I don't know how to be

alone here” (248). Priya’s statement indicates that she is not any different from any other character in a diasporic novel. The descriptions of Priya’s and Tara’s despair in the U.S. indicates that their diasporic journey is difficult. It also suggests that the characters are culturally alone and that they desire to re-connect to a familiar culture.

Both protagonists hold on to the belief that they can spiritually find themselves if they return home, return to the country from which they came. Vijay Mishra examines the desire to return to the homeland, to India: “The fantasy of the homeland is then linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected moment when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother (father) land” (423). Mishra finds that diasporic subjects experience a trauma when they leave the homeland. Furthermore he asserts that “diasporic discourse of the homeland is thus a kind of return of the repressed for the nation-state itself, its pre-symbolic (imaginary) narrative, in which one sees a more primitive theorization of the nation itself” (425). Mishra’s Lacanian notion suggests that the protagonist’s desire to go home is in part due to the trauma that she experiences when she leaves the homeland. Mishra’s idea also indicates the character’s belief that the homeland is a place where she belongs.

In diasporic literature that is critically recognized, Tara can find her way in the world if she returns to Calcutta. Tara’s wish to go to Calcutta is the desire that Mishra explores and she dreams “of this return to India. She [believes] that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad [will] be erased quite magically if she [can] just return home to Calcutta” (30). Tara longs for the time before she leaves for the U.S.; she imagines that her life was complete and she tries to re-capture that memory. Sudesh Mishra contends that Mukherjee traces “the split in the diasporic subject, expressed in

that sense of being here and elsewhere, of being at home and abroad” (287). Mishra’s praise suggests that Mukherjee is able to convey effectively the troubles that an Indian heroine endures in the diaspora; spiritually, part of the character remains in India, while another part is in the diaspora.

And similar to the protagonist in diasporic literature that scholars recognize, the Indian heroine in chick-lit also desires to return home. Priya wants to go home to India because “‘everything hurts, and [she] just want[s] to be with [her] parents’” (249). Priya’s desire to be with her family suggests that she believes that her return to India will provide a sense of security. Her longing for India further indicates her belief that she can return to her life before her marriage, before she left for the U.S. The depiction of the characters’ desire to return home suggests that they believe they can fix their culturally torn souls if they go home.

Both Indian heroines ultimately discover that they can never spiritually return to India. Their experience in the diaspora changes their lives forever. Tara and Priya find it difficult to re-connect to the motherland; their connection to India changes. Carine M. Mardorossian asserts that the “origin community is revealed as a dynamic and changing world which cannot be reclaimed intact and can only be envisioned through a fragmented vision” (22). She further argues that “the traditional notion of ‘home’ as belonging and community is exposed as a myth” (22). Mardorossian’s claim suggests that the homeland changes constantly and that no one is ever really truly ever able to go ‘home.’ Mardorossian’s contention further indicates that the heroines are unable to go home not only because they themselves change in the diaspora, but also because their homeland changes. Mardorossian’s argument also hints that the nation in Vijay Mishra’s

“‘imagined community’” (424) is nothing more than a myth. In her analysis, Mardorossian examines the characters’ arrival in the homeland, while Mishra only explores the characters’ fantasy to return home. When Mardorossian points out that the characters are not able to return home, she shows that Mishra’s dream of the homeland can never become a reality.

Tara no longer finds the streets of Mumbai to be aesthetically pleasing. “Seven years earlier on her way to Vassar,” Tara admires the houses in Bombay and thinks that they are “fashionable” (22); however, “now their shabbiness [appalls] her” (22). Tara’s time in the U.S. alters her sense of what is beautiful; she compares the buildings in Mumbai those in the United States, and she finds that the Indian buildings are not as nice as the ones in New York. Tara finds it difficult to find beauty in her homeland. She is aware that her relationship with India changes and she expresses it when she asks, “How does the foreignness of the spirit begin?” (45) She continues to ask if it drifts “inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she [watches] the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls, Protestant matrons, and Johnny Mathis?” (45) Tara’s query suggests her realization that her life is different for her in India; it indicates that her experience in the diaspora changes her identity. Now that Tara is home, she discovers that India is not what she remembered. She finds that home is more difficult to define.

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel asserts that “Tara’s alienation in her homeland, [...], has been underwritten by a history of cultural change wrought by colonialism” (96). Gabriel’s claim indicates that Tara’s alienation begins not only in the diaspora, but also in Calcutta, which aligns with Mardorossian’s argument. Gabriel’s argument also suggests that Tara’s withdrawal from India arises from the change that India undergoes constantly

after its liberation from colonialism. After Tara leaves India for New York, India continues to culturally change and evolve.

Similarly, Priya's experience in the diaspora alters her view of Indian ideologies. For instance, Priya's perspective on women in the workplace changes. Before Priya's experience in the U.S., she never worked and "no woman in [her] family [...] ever worked" (251). However, after Priya's return to India, she considers applying for a job at the gossip magazine Vivacious! She reads the advertisement for the position "with detachment, no longer caught up in the frothy words on the page about the unreal life of people on the big screen" (251). Priya's accomplishment at Hollywood Insider teaches her that the people on the silver screen are real characters with actual problems. Also, the accolades that Priya receives from her co-workers in Beverly Hills illustrate to her that she possesses a skill: she has the ability to enable people to open up to her. Now that Priya knows that she has an expertise, she desires to work. Priya's identification with India changes; she no longer wants to sit at home like the rest of her sisters and wait for her family to find her a husband. Instead, Priya wants to be unlike everyone else and work as a professional journalist. Priya also learns that she is not able to return home to India; the India that she returns to is different from the India that she left. Here, the novels reiterate that the diaspora alienates the characters. Now that the protagonists are home, they discover that they are different and that they do not belong in India. If they do not belong in India, where do they fit in?

Upon return to the homeland, both heroines feel isolated from their loved ones. William Safran asserts that the people of the homeland "view the diaspora with a certain disdain for having been enticed by the fleshpots of capitalism and for retaining a

vulgarized ethnic culture” (93). Safran’s argument suggests that characters who still reside in the homeland resent the Indian heroines for abandoning their homeland’s culture. He indicates that the characters in the homeland find the Indian protagonists some-what tainted by their experience in the diaspora. Now, not only do the heroines find it difficult to re-connect to India, but also their loved ones at home reject them.

In The Tiger’s Daughter, Tara finds it challenging to connect with her childhood friends. Tara feels “very distant from the passions that quickened or outrages her class in Calcutta” (70). After living in the U.S., Tara’s ideals change; issues that were important in her childhood are no longer paramount now that she is an adult. Her friends express their displeasure with her marriage to David, to someone outside of their caste. Tara’s friends find that her time in the diaspora erodes “all that [is] fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (70). So, not only does Tara realize that her connection to India changes, but also her close friends recognize it. Tara’s childhood companions recognize her as the “other” and not as one of them. Krishna Sen applauds Mukherjee for her depiction of the heroine’s identity alteration in the diaspora: “The assumption of successive identities while transiting through cultures is viewed, not as a dilution of the Self, but as a rich expression of potential selves embedded within the Self” (23). Sen’s accolade indicates that the leading lady’s identity reformation in the diaspora is a positive occurrence.

Similarly in Indian chick-lit, Priya learns her peers’ view of her changes. Priya’s family’s advice for her marriage is to “obey, be quiet, and you will always be happy” (250). So once Priya’s marriage terminates, her loved ones treat her like she is a failure. She points out that other characters in India point or “cast their eyes downward onto the paan-stained pavement” (250) in order to express their pity for her and her family.

Priya's Aunt Vimla hypothesizes in order to decipher why Priya's marriage ends and asserts that "maybe [Priya] became too American [in Beverly Hills]" (251). Like Tara's friends, Priya's friends and family resent Priya's adoption of U.S. customs and culture, like divorce. The disappointing journey home to India re-defines the notion of home for the characters. Now, they know that India is not the same as it was before they left for the U.S. The heroines' alienation in India highlights their overall estrangement in the diaspora. Furthermore, the leading ladies' alienation at home in India also emphasizes how difficult a diasporic experience is. The protagonists will never be like they were before their diasporic journey. Ultimately, the alienation Tara and Priya encounter in India shatters their fantasy of the homeland and of fitting in there; the characters discover that India is not a place where they belong or a place where they identify with others.



## CONCLUSION

In the end, the aim of this exploration is to highlight Indian chick-lit's literary merits and to point out that it deserves post-colonial scholars' recognition. Indian chick-lit is valuable because it is a cultural artifact; it is a genre that represents Indian female characters' issues like discovering love, being beautiful, and obtaining an ideal career in the twenty-first century. Terry Eagleton asserts that the "fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns [...] might be one reason why certain works of literature seem to retain their value across the centuries" (10). Eagleton's argument is applicable to Indian chick-lit. Indian chick-lit's importance lies in its presentation of Indian heroines' cultural struggles in the diaspora in America. This Indian sub-genre typifies not only the experience of Indian women in the diaspora, but also the experience of the tens of millions of women in the post-colonial developing world. All of these women experience some form of alienation after colonialism.

Another of Indian chick-lit's literary merits is its use of humor as a narrative strategy. What separates Indian chick-lit from serious literature is Indian chick-lit's prolific use of slapstick action. While some serious novels may incorporate comedy, every Indian chick-lit novel consists of witty gags and jokes. In Goddess of Hire, the novel shows itself to be a playful novel when it characterizes Maya as the Hindu goddess of destruction. She acts as a superhero when she kicks butt all over Beverly Hills in order to save the world from men and women who are evil.

Indian chick-lit's convivial resolutions also set it apart from other novels. All Indian chick-lit novels end happily when the heroine finds love and when all her problems are solved, whereas in some serious literature, the resolution may end in

sadness. In The Village Bride of Beverly Hills, the conclusion leaves the reader with an optimistic outlook when all ends well. Sanjay follows Priya to India to beg for her return to the U.S. as well as to tell her that he moved out of his parents' house and that he no longer cares whether she works as a reporter.

Indian chick-lit's significance also lies in its relationship to other Indian novels whose authors are Indian women, such as Bharati Mukerjee, Amulya Malladi, and Chitra Divakaruni, who describe Indian female characters in the U.S. Indian chick-lit's adherence to mainstream culture grasps readers' attention and acts as a gateway for readers to become immersed in more serious novels by Indian female authors. And in Indian chick-lit's connection to other Indian novels that are by women and about women, post-colonial scholars can trace common threads that link all novels about Indian heroines together in the same way that chick-lit relates to the works of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Frances Burney, and Edith Wharton.

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